

## **Meth abuse soars**

*By Sam Hananel - 03/03/2006*

WASHINGTON — Drug treatment centers have seen a substantial rise in the number of people seeking help for methamphetamine abuse, a report released Thursday said.

As trafficking in the highly addictive drug has spread across the country, the number of meth users admitted to substance abuse clinics more than quadrupled from 1993 to 2003, according to a review by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

The report was released hours before the Senate passed legislation to combat meth by limiting sales of cold medicines used to make the illegal drug.

States in the Midwest and South that had few meth abuse patients a decade ago are now seeing a sharp rise in the rate of admissions to treatment centers, the report said. The findings mirror the trend of meth abuse moving gradually from the West — where the drug first became popular — across the Midwest and South to the East Coast.

“It’s not that the prevalence of meth is changing, but the addictive nature of this drug and the meth crisis is showing up in drug treatment programs,” said Mark Weber, an associate administrator for the agency. “They’re being overwhelmed by the number of people showing up for treatment.”

Nationwide, the admission rate for treatment of methamphetamine or amphetamine abuse rose from 28,000 in 1993 to nearly 136,000 patients in 2003, the report said. The review analyzed data on the approximately 1.8 million patients admitted each year for substance abuse treatment.

The report found 18 states with meth treatment rates higher than the national rate: Oregon was highest, followed by Hawaii, Iowa, California, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada, Washington, Montana, Arkansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Minnesota, South Dakota, Colorado, Missouri, Idaho and Kansas.

Northeastern states had relatively low rates of treatment admissions for meth and amphetamine abuse in 1993 and those rates remained low in 2003, the report said.

Part of the reason meth has become epidemic in some states, experts say, is that it’s easy to make in illegal makeshift labs and extremely cheap compared to other drugs.

“You get can get addicted to meth very quickly and the slide downward is much faster than drugs like alcohol, marijuana or heroin,” said Stephan Arndt, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Iowa and director of the Iowa Consortium for Substance Abuse Research and Evaluation.

“These people crash and burn fast,” Arndt said. “Health goes down, you’re not eating, you’re not sleeping. You’re more likely to lose the car, lose the wife, lose the house and your job.”

In his budget request last month, President Bush proposed \$25 million in new money for meth treatment.

The Senate, meanwhile, passed anti-meth legislation Thursday — as part of the bill reauthorizing the USA Patriot Act — that would require cold pills like Sudafed to be placed behind store counters. Those medicines contain pseudoephedrine, which can be extracted and used to cook meth in makeshift labs.

“Because of the steps we are taking, many Americans will never experience the addiction and destruction of this deadly drug,” said Sen. Jim Talent, R-Mo., who co-sponsored the anti-meth bill with Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif.

Under the bill, consumers would be limited to 3.6 grams, or about 120 cold pills, per day, and 9 grams, or about 300 pills, per month. Buyers would need to show photo identification and sign a logbook.

The measure also provides nearly \$100 million for law enforcement to investigate and lock up meth offenders and establishes new reporting procedures for countries that export chemicals used to make meth.

The House is expected to pass the Patriot Act next week and send it to Bush, who has promised to sign it by March 10.

On the Net:

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration:  
<http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/2k6/methTx/methTX.cfm>